

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DEAE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5482

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 2018

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR, MASS, BM
SUBJECT: NARCOTICS--INSTRUCTOR/TACTICAL TRAINING FOR HELICOPTER
PILOTS

REF: (A) STATE 130562 (B) RANGOON 1191 (C) STATE 103133

1. WE FULLY AGREE WITH AND SUPPORT THE POLICY AS STATED IN
REFS A AND C THAT MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND NARCOTICS CONTROL
PROGRAMS FOR BURMA SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATE. HOWEVER, THE NATURE
OF THE SITUATION IN BURMA MAKES THIS CONCEPT DIFFICULT, IF NOT
IMPOSSIBLE, FULLY TO IMPLEMENT IN PRACTICE. THE REQUESTED
TACTICAL TRAINING FOR BURMESE HELICOPTER PILOTS (REF B) IS A
CASE IN POINT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN ADDITION TO NOTING THE NEED TO
KEEP NARCOTICS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE SEPARATE, REF C STATED
"NARCOTICS CONTROL-RELATED TRAINING SHOULD, THEREFORE, CONTINUE
TO BE REQUESTED AS PART OF THE INC PROGRAM FOR BURMA." SINCE
WE CONSIDERED THAT TACTICAL TRAINING FOR THE PILOTS WOULD BE
VERY MUCH NARCOTICS CONTROL-RELATED, WE THOUGHT THAT OUR REQUEST
WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE GUIDANCE. UNFORTUNATELY, A RATHER LARGE
DEGREE OF AMBIGUITY IS INHERENT IN THE SITUATION, AND WE
RECOGNIZE THAT WE WILL HAVE TO LIVE WITH IT.

2. PERHAPS IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO RE-STATE THE PROBLEM WHICH
WE SOUGHT TO ADDRESS THROUGH THIS TRAINING:
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A. BECAUSE THE BULK OF THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING
IN BURMA IS DONE BY LARGE, WELL-ARMED, MILITARY, INSURGENT
FORCES (OR IS DONE UNDER THE PROTECTION OF SUCH FORCES), ALMOST
ALL FIELD OPERATIONS AGAINST THIS TRAFFICKING ARE OF NECESSITY
MILITARY IN NATURE. AS DIRECTED BY THE GUB, THE BURMA ARMY
CONDUCTS SUCH OPERATIONS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE BURMA AIR

FORCE; AND IT WAS PRIMARILY TO MAKE THESE OPERATIONS MORE EFFECTIVE THAT WE GAVE HELICOPTERS AND TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT TO THE BURMESE.

B. IN THEIR OPERATIONS AGAINST NARCOTICS CARAVANS AND BORDER-AREA REFINERY INSTALLATIONS, THE BURMESE HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS IN THE PAST TWO YEARS IN DISRUPTING THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE ACTUALLY TO DESTROY A CARAVAN; AND IN THEIR BORDER-AREA ATTACKS, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL REFINERIES ALONG WITH IMPRESSIVE QUANTITIES OF RAW AND SEMI-PROCESSED OPIUM AND CHEMICALS HAVE BEEN SEIZED, THE TRAFFICKERS HAVE IN EVERY CASE BEEN ABLE TO ESCAPE ALONG WITH MOST ALL OF THE REFINED PRODUCT.

C. ONE MAJOR REASON FOR THE LESS THAN COMPLETE SUCCESS OF THE BURMESE ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS IS THAT THEY HAVE NOT USED THE HELICOPTERS AS EFFECTIVELY AS THEY MIGHT, HAVING CHOSEN TO EMPLOY THEM PRIMARILY IN A TRANSPORTATION/ LOGISTICAL RATHER THAN A TACTICAL ROLE. THAT IS, THE BURMESE HAVE MARCHED THEIR FORCES FROM BASE CAMPS TO THE OBJECTIVES, OR LANDED THEM AT SECURE SITES CONSIDERABLE DISTANCES AWAY FROM THE BORDER AREA TARGETS, THUS LOSING THE CRUCIAL ELEMENT OF SURPRISE. MOREOVER, THEIR OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN RATHER UNIMAGINATIVE IN CONCEPT, BEING LIMITED MOSTLY TO SWEEPS OR CLEARING OPERATIONS--THEY HAVE THUS FAR FAILED TO USE QUICK IN-AND-OUT RAIDS BY SMALL FORCES TO DESTROY TARGETS SUCH AS

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ACTIVE REFINERIES, TO CONDUCT LONG-RANGE PENETRATION PATROLS, AND TO EMPLOY OTHER MODERN AIRMOBILE TACTICS. THIS IS AT LEAST PARTLY BECAUSE BURMESE MILITARY COMMANDERS HAVE INSUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING OF SUCH TACTICS, OR AT LEAST LITTLE EXPERIENCE AND CONFIDENCE IN THEM. AN EQUALLY OR PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION IS THAT THE BURMESE ARE VERY SENSITIVE TO THE VULNERABILITY OF THE UNARMED HELICOPTER (PROBABLY TO AN UNWARRANTED DEGREE); THEY ARE NOT SURE THE HELICOPTERS WOULD BE REPLACED IF THEY WERE LOST; AND THUS THEY DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO MINIMIZE DANGER TO THEM, I.E., TO KEEP THEM AWAY FROM POTENTIAL COMBAT SITUATIONS. RECENTLY, AN APPARENT DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ON THIS TOPIC HAS DEVELOPED AMONG SENIOR GUB MILITARY OFFICIALS, WITH AIR FORCE OFFICERS SHOWING A GROWING PERCEPTION OF AND CONFIDENCE IN THE TACTICAL POTENTIAL OF THE HELICOPTERS.

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DEAE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 2018

D. WE BELIEVE, AND WOULD LIKE TO SHOW THE BURMESE, THAT ANTI-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS HERE COULD GREATLY BENEFIT FROM THE USE OF MODERN AIRMOBILE TACTICS, WHICH EVOLVED IN THE 1960'S. FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE PROPER KIND OF PREPARATION, APPROACH, AIR-GROUND COORDINATION, ETC., IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR THE BURMESE TO LAND SMALL FORCES ON OR IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO THEIR OBJECTIVES, OR INSERT LARGER FORCES IN BLOCKING POSITIONS, AND THEREBY INFLICT MUCH GREATER DAMAGE ON THE TRAFFICKERS THAN THEY ARE NOW ABLE TO DO. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THIS WOULD INVOLVE SOME INCREASED RISK TO THE HELICOPTERS AND POSSIBLY INCREASED EXPENSE FOR US IN REPLACING THEM. HOWEVER, WE THINK THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION OUTWEIGHT THE POTENTIAL ADDED COSTS, FROM THE GUB POINT OF VIEW AS WELL AS THAT OF THE USG. WHILE TRAINING FOUR HELICOPTER AIRMOBILE TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES WOULD NOT NECESSARILY SERVE TO CONVINCE SENIOR BURMESE MILITARY COMMANDERS THAT THE COST-BENEFIT RATIO WOULD BE FAVORABLE IF SUCH TACTICS WERE EMPLOYED, IT WOULD AT LEAST BE AN IMPORTANT STEP IN THIS DIRECTION.

3. THE ONLY ORGANIZATION OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE THAT COULD FULLY DEMONSTRATE THESE TACTICS AND PROVIDE ALL THE NECESSARY TRAINING IN THEM IS THE U.S. ARMY. IT SEEMS TO US UNLIKELY THAT ANY CIVILIAN FIRM WOULD HAVE OR COULD DEVELOP THE NECESSARY FACILITIES AT A REASONABLE COST. HOWEVER, IF SUCH A FIRM EXISTS, IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE BURMESE WOULD BE HAPPY TO ACCEPT
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TRAINING FROM IT RATHER THAN FROM THE ARMY.

4. A POTENTIALLY MORE PROMISING ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE A TAILORED TRAINING PROGRAM OF SOME SORT, WITH A CIVILIAN FIRM TAKING ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TRAINEES, TEACHING THEM APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES SUCH AS NAP-OF-THE-EARTH FLYING,

ETC.; AND THE ARMY PROVIDING EXTENSIVE OBSERVATION OF AND PARTICIPATION IN ACTUAL TRAINING EXERCISES AS WELL AS ANY OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM IT IS UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO OFFER. THE MILITARY PORTION OF THE TRAINING MIGHT BE A PART OF THE CIVILIAN PROGRAM. WE RECOGNIZE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT COULD BE ADMINISTRATIVELY DIFFICULT, BUT WE THINK THE IDEA IS WORTH EXPLORING.

5. IF THE ALTERNATIVES MENTIONED IN PARAS 3 AND 4 PROVE UNFEASIBLE, AND IF YOU STILL CONSIDER IT IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVIDE THE REQUESTED TRAINING WHOLLY AT U.S. ARMY FACILITIES UNDER THE INC PROGRAM, WE REQUEST THAT YOU DETERMINE IF IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO EXPAND THE CONTEMPLATED IMET PROGRAM FOR BURMA SO AS TO COVER THIS TRAINING.

6. IF NONE OF THE ABOVE SUGGESTIONS IS ACCEPTABLE, PLEASE LET US KNOW IF THERE IS SOME OTHER APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM WE HAVE IDENTIFIED WHICH MIGHT PROVE WORKABLE.

7. THE DEFENSE ATTACHE HAS READ THIS MESSAGE AND CONCURS.
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Message Attributes

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